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A
MEDICAL and PHILOSOPHICAL ESSAY
ON THE
Theory of the GOUT;

To which are ſubjoined ſome

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS
On the EFFECTS of
NEGATIVE ELECTRICITY.

> "Artem denique medicam videmus, ſi a naturali philoſophiâ
> "deſtituatur, empiricorum praxi haud multum præſtare."
>
> BACON, Lib. iv, Cap. 1, de Augmentis Scientiarum.

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LONDON:
Printed for P. ELMSLY, oppoſite Southampton-
Street, in the Strand. 1781.

> “ Votis, Ominibuſque et Precibus vocat.”
>
> Hor.

TO THE

PRESIDENT AND FELLOWS

OF THE

ROYAL MEDICAL SOCIETY
OF EDINBURGH,

WITH THE MOST ELEVATED OPINION

OF THEIR

MEDICAL AND PHILOSOPHICAL ABILITIES,

THE FOLLOWING THOUGHTS ARE

INSCRIBED BY

THEIR MOST OBEDIENT

HUMBLE SERVANT,

THE AUTHOR.

"Experience and obſervation, the "two great guides to human know"ledge, have convinced us that there is "diffuſed within the ſubſtance, and on "the ſurface of all bodies, whether ani"mal, vegetable, or mineral, a certain "fluid, which ſome have called æther, "ſome phlogiſton, others the ſulphu"reous principle, the inflammable ſub"ſtance, the electric fluid, or the ele"mentary fire." Rev. Mr. Lyon's Exp. and Obſ. on Electr. Ch. xiv, p. 195.

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two great guides to human know-
ledge, have convinced us that there is
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the surface of the earth, whether ani-
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[illegible] which, [illegible] together,
[illegible]
[illegible] the inimitable [illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]
[illegible]

ON THE

THEORY of the GOUT.

WE are taught by phyſiology, that "the ſolid parts of animals and "vegetables have this fabric in com-"mon, that their elements, or the "ſmalleſt parts we can ſee by the fineſt "microſcope, are either fibres, or an "unorganiſed concrete."

Haller's Phyſiol. Lect. 1, § 2.

Philoſophy tells us that the phyſical elements or component parts of an animal fibre, are, æther, air, water and earth: health is the reſult of a due combination and unimpeded action of theſe principles, whilſt exceſs or defect proves the cauſe of diſeaſed ſolids. It is therefore the buſineſs of the art of healing, aided by philoſophic inveſtigation, to ſearch out the latent cauſe of diſeaſe, and find to an exceſs or defect of what principle diſorder can moſt probably be aſcribed: this is the intention of the following Eſſay.

Modern philoſophers know that ſubtle fluid, which we have juſt called æther, by other names, as, the elementary fire, electric fluid, or phlogiſton. This ſubtle fluid we are certain enters into the animal ſyſtem, and there performs an active part; but let us here take a view of what Dr. Prieſtley has given us on this ſubject. "Nothing will nouriſh," ſays he, "that does not contain phlogiſton, "and probably in ſuch a ſtate as to be "eaſily ſeparated from it by the animal "functions.

"That the ſource of muſcular motion
"is phlogiſton, is ſtill more probable
"from the conſideration of the well-
"known effects of vinous and ſpiritu-
"ous liquors, which conſiſt very much
"of phlogiſton, and which inſtantly
"brace and ſtrenghthen the whole
"nervous and muſcular ſyſtem; the
"phlogiſton in this caſe being, perhaps,
"more eaſily extricated and by a leſs
"tedious animal proceſs, than in the
"uſual method of extracting it from
"mild aliments. Since, however, the
"mildeſt aliments do the ſame thing
"more ſlowly and permanently that
"ſpirituous liquors do ſuddenly and
"tranſiently, it ſeems probable that their
"operation is ultimately the ſame."—
On Air, p. 277.

The Doctor further conjectures that animals "have a power of converting "phlogiſton, from the ſtate in which

„ they

"they receive it in their nutriment, into
"that ſtate in which it is called the elec-
"trical fluid; that the brain, beſides it's
"other proper uſes, is the great labora-
"tory and repoſitory for this purpoſe;
"that by means of the nerves, this great
"principle, thus exalted, is directed in-
"to the muſcles, and forces them to act,
"in the ſame manner as they are forced
"into action, when the electric fluid is
"thrown into them *ab extra*."—

Ibid. p. 278.

We have now ſeen the opinion of this great philoſopher, will it then appear a mere chimæra of fancy, a futile hypotheſis void of every glimpſe of rational idea, if I ſhould declare it my opinion, that the gout proceeds from an exceſs of phlogiſton or electric fluid in the body? Do not the uſual ſymptoms of a common arthritic attack, or podagric paroxyſm appear more properly referable to the effects of an exceſs of ſuch a ſubtle fluid or fire, than any other thing in nature? How this may gain admittance into the animal ſyſtem we have juſt ſeen, and as luxury and indolence muſt be acknowledged as the primary cauſe of this diſorder, ſo do they in effect confirm this hypotheſis; the former by accumulating a ſurcharge, and the latter by preventing a diſcharge of phlogiſton. The reaſon then is very evident why this complaint is ſeldom found in the homely cottages of induſtrious poverty; if this enemy chance to gain admittance into their ſyſtem by the rare entertainment of a luxurious feaſt, he is ſoon diſlodged by the vigorous efforts of a ſtrong and healthy conſtitution, rendered ſo by activity and daily labour, increaſing the power of every emunctory and outlet to this dread companion.

The great luminary of medical erudition in the preſent age, Dr. Cullen, has

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The great luminary of medical erudition in the preſent age, Dr. Cullen, has very ably refuted the theory of other writers on the gout, and from juſt obſervation and ſound practice, called the gout a diſorder of the nervous ſyſtem: I think myſelf therefore happy to have it in my power to adduce ſo ſtrong a corroboration of my ſentiments. As the notion of a nervous fluid moving in the nerves, by which all ſenſation is performed, ſeems now pretty thoroughly eſtabliſhed, may we not ſuppoſe that a diſeaſe of this powerful agent may ariſe; diſordering the nerves, injuring the moving powers, and cauſing thoſe painful ſenſations, which gouty martyrs declare impoſſible to be deſcribed.

It would be needleſs to attempt to prove the exiſtence of a nervous liquid, which Mr. Cheſelden proved next to a demonſtration by the repetition of the experiment firſt made by Bellini, and related by Bohn and Pitcairn, and which he ſays, he has often done with exact good ſucceſs.

Vide Cheſelden's Anat. p. 249.

Dr. Mead, though he believed the exiſtence of ſuch a fluid, yet was as ignorant of it's nature, as Sir Iſaac Newton was of electricity, from an attention to which ſcience, the preſent age has acquired ſuch unexpected inſight into the ſecret and, before, inexplicable works of nature.

> "Alterum in luſtrum meliuſque ſemper proroget
> "ævum." HORACE.

We ought not, however, grow arrogant with diſcovery, but rather make uſe of the ingenious Dr. Watſon's expreſſion. "Notwithſtanding the very "great progreſs which has been made in "our improvements in this part of natural philoſophy within theſe few "years; poſterity will regard us as "only in our *noviciate*; and therefore it

" behoves us, as far as we can be juſti-
" fied therein by experiment, to correct
" any concluſions we may have drawn,
" if others yet more probable preſent
" themſelves." Philoſoph. Tranſact.
abridged, vol. 10. p. 373.

This is applicable to all theoriſts. I ſhall therefore not attach myſelf ſo obſtinately to my preſent theory, as not to be open to conviction; I publiſh my ſentiments for the inſpection of men of literature, knowing that what is not founded in truth, muſt neceſſarily, in this age of ſcience, fall; this truth, ſo far from diſmaying, muſt certainly prompt the ſpirit of philoſophic enquiry. As I am now on the ſubject of the gout, I ſhall in this place, take notice of thoſe ſubſtances, obſervable after repeated fits of the gout, and known by the name of chalk-ſtones. Theſe ſubſtances, from their nature, I ſuppoſe contain a large quantity of fixed air; I therefore ſuppoſe that the phlogiſton collected in the pained part during a paroxyſm, may unite with, or be attracted by an acid air; hence, paſſing off in that acid ſweat, or perſpiration, we always perceive at the termination of a paroxyſm, leaving the fixed air, which perhaps before made part of it's compoſition as the nervous fluid, to be abſorbed by ſome of the animal fluids; this, moſt probably, from theſe ſubſtances appearing near the joints or bony parts, is effected by the oſſific juice, which forming an obſtruction too ſtrong for the weak momentum of the circulation in thoſe parts (being generally the extremities) to overcome, is at length protruded on the ſuperficies, or juſt under the cuticle of the ſkin, and known by the name of chalk-ſtone. The following obſervation of Dr. Prieſtley ſeems to confirm this conjecture. " Phlogiſton, ſays he, having a ſtronger

"affinity with acid air, which I ſuppoſe
"to be the baſis of common air, than
"with fixed air, it is not ſurpriſing
"that, uniting with this, in preference
"to fixed air, the latter ſhould be preci-
"pitated, whenever a quantity of com-
"mon air is made noxious, by an over-
"charge of phlogiſton."

On Air, p. 265.

May not this reaſoning be admitted in the preſent caſe? And as to the conjecture, that fixed air enters into the compoſition of the nervous liquid, though we have yet no experiment to verify ſuch a ſuppoſition, yet from the wonderful properties aſcribed to this principle by Dr. Hales, and experimentally confirmed by Dr. M'Bride, in his Medical and Philoſophical Eſſays, we have no reaſon to think ſuch a thing utterly impoſſible.—Dr. Hales aſcribes the power of fixing or reducing air to a non-elaſtic ſtate, to phlogiſton or the ſulphur principle. See Hale's Stat. vol. 11. p. 108. Does not ſuch a property ſeem to favour our hypotheſis? The truth and validity of ſuch a conjecture I muſt however leave for ſuperior abilities to receive or reject, and time to eſtabliſh or overthrow; be it as it may, we ought by no means to ſtop our enquiries after knowledge, but purſue them with unremitting labour, remembering the obſervation of the elegant Latin Hippocrates. "Itaque iſta quoque "naturæ rerum contemplatio, quamvis "non faciat medicum, aptiorem tamen "medicinæ reddit." Cels. Lib. 1. in Præf.

The ancients, it muſt be confeſſed, have done very little towards the cure of the gout. Hippocrates himſelf has only a few remarks, as Aphoriſm, 28, 29 and 30, Lib. 6, concerning the ποδαγριᾶ, yet he ſufficiently in the firſt aphoriſm, and throughout his works, inculcates the importance of phyſical obſervation.

Before I conclude theſe remarks, I would take notice of two things, which ſeem to add ſtrength to our argument.— Firſt, the cracking or breaking of ſulphur in the hands of a gouty perſon during a paroxyſm, from which they have been known to find an abatement or ceſſation of pain. — Secondly, the effects of the common poſitive electricity on ſome gouty people, when, to all appearance, free from gouty ſymptoms. For both theſe obſervations I am obliged to a very worthy, intimate, and learned friend: being conſtantly with him during his confinement, for ſeveral months, I had an opportunity of obſerving, that a roll of ſulphur held in his hand, when in the moſt violent pain, preſently ſnapped or broke, giving the ſenſation of a ſmall electrical ſhock;

from this my philoſophic friend thought he derived immediate, tho' not laſting relief. Once in particular, he was relieved by a conſumption of a large quantity of ſulphur, but as his pain returned on it's diſcontinuance, he was then laughed out of what was called fancy, and attributed more to the power of imagination, than any phyſical cauſe. This ſame gentleman, once when attending Mr. Walker's lectures at York, was electrified, the ſhock, which was ſcarcely felt by two ladies between whom he ſtood, proved ſo ſevere on him, as to knock him down, and give him ſuch an immediate violent gouty pain, as could only be removed by the ſtrongeſt cordials: he alſo aſſures me, that a common thunder ſtorm has a ſtrange effect on his conſtitution, giving him moſt acute, nervous emotions.

As I have now delivered my ſentiments

ments on the cauſe of an intricate diſorder, I ſhall ceaſe my theoretical enquiry, and proceed to offer ſome

PRACTICAL OBSERVATIONS

On the Effects of Negative Electricity, in regard to the Cure of the Gout.

"Quoniam autem ex tribus medicinæ
"partibus, ut difficillima, ſic etiam cla-
"riſſima eſt ea, quæ morbis medetur,
"ante omnia de hac dicendum eſt.

"Eſt enim hæc ars conjecturalis,
"neque reſpondet ei plerumque non ſo-
"lum conjectura, ſed etiam experientia."
Celſus in Præf.

If the foregoing theory be admitted, perhaps no ſtudy will ſeem more likely to furniſh a cure for the gout, than that of electricity; let us therefore take a view of that part of the ſcience, which teaches the method of abſtracting the natural ſhare of electric fluid from bodies. Surely if philoſophers have entertained a juſt opinion of phlogiſton, the operation of negative electricity bids fair to remove a ſurcharge of this principle; I ſhall therefore proceed to give a ſmall account of this part of the ſcience: I muſt beg pardon of my philoſophic reader, for the recital of facts with which he is well acquainted, but as ſome of my readers may not have applied themſelves much to this ſtudy, they will, I preſume, thank me for the trouble I have given myſelf.

Electricians have ſome time ago diſtinguiſhed two kinds of electricity, *viz.* a poſitive and negative; or, as Dr. Franklin terms it, a plus and minus in electricity.

The Abbé Nollet, to whom this ſcience is greatly indebted, built his darling theory of affluences and effluences on the obſervation, that bodies not inſulated, plunged in electric atmoſpheres, ſhewed ſigns of electricity.

" He obſerved a ſenſible blaſt from the
" hand of a perſon not electrified, in the
" above circumſtances; alſo the attrac-
" tion and repulſion of light bodies by
" them; the appearance of flame; the
" diminution of their weight by in-
" creaſed evaporation and perſpiration;
" and almoſt every other appearance and
" effect of electricity. Moreover, ob-
" ſerving that this globe contracted a
" foulneſs while it was whirling, even
" when rubbed with a clean hand, he
" had the curioſity to collect a quantity
" of the matter which formed that foul-
" neſs, and finding that when it was
" put into the fire it had the ſmell of

" burnt hair, he concluded that it was an
" animal ſubſtance, and that it had been
" carried by the affluent electricity from
" his own body to the globe."

Prieſtley's Hiſt. of Electr. p. 118.

This was a truly great diſcovery, and ſeems worthy the attention of medical men; it gives us hopes that a negative electric machine may be invented capable of diſcharging the peccant phlogiſton, or electric fluid, in a leſs painful and more ſpeedy manner than Nature unaſſiſted uſually effects: we muſt however recollect, that the practice of medicine, on the moſt elevated plan, can be no other than nicely to aſſiſt the operations of Nature, or the efforts of the patient's conſtitution. The Gout generally attacks the extremities; ſhould we not therefore attend to this obſervation, and fly to aſſiſt the part we ſee oppreſſed?

To continue our account of negative electricity, we muſt obſerve that the Abbé Nollet, from whom we have recited a curious obſervation, did not ſufficiently preſerve the diſtinction of the two oppoſite electricities ; but Mr. Canton, Dr. Franklin, and Mr. Wilcke were however led to great diſcoveries. The Doctor, in anſwer to a doubt of his friend Mr. Kinnerſley (an American gentleman diſtinguiſhed in this ſcience) whether glaſs or ſulphur electrified poſitively, gave it as his opinion, that the glaſs globe charged poſitively, and the ſulphur negatively, for ſome very ſubſtantial reaſons, which may be ſeen in Prieſtley's Hiſt. of Electr. p. 181, and Franklin's Letters, p. 104. The moſt applicable to our purpoſe we ſhall here take the liberty to tranſcribe. " He obſerved, " that when he held his knuckle before " the ſulphur globe while it was turn- " ing, the ſtream of fire between his

“ knuckle and the globe ſeemed to ſpread
“ on its ſurface, as if it flowed from the
“ finger, but before the glaſs globe it
“ was otherwiſe.” Does not this help us to account for the breaking of a roll of ſulphur which we in another place took notice of? the electric fluid which we ſuppoſe to exiſt in the body to a morbid degree, being attracted by the negative electric, at length ſo much overcharges it as to make it break or diſcharge itſelf; this may be illuſtrated by the Leyden phial, or electrical battery, which we know frequently diſcharge themſelves.

Having dwelt ſufficiently on the exceſs of phlogiſton, let us now take a view of thoſe means Nature employs to diſcharge ſuch an enemy. Dr. Prieſtley ſuppoſes, that “ the phlogiſton which we take in
“ with our aliment, after having diſ-
“ charged its proper function in the ani-

"mal ſyſtem (by which it probably un-
"dergoes ſome unknown alteration) is
"diſcharged as *effete* by the lungs into
"the great common menſtruum the at-
"moſphere." On Air, p. 277.

To this conjecture, without the leaſt detraction from this great man, who declares himſelf no phyſician, I would add, that it is not improbable but inſenſible perſpiration, and perhaps all the ſecretions, aſſiſt more or leſs in this office. Increaſed perſpiration is the uſual method of carrying off a fit of the gout, and a perſon once afflicted with this cruel diſtemper is ſeldom free from the bonds of flannel, and the preſcription from which he derives the greateſt benefit is patience.

But might not the wool or flannel in ſuch caſes, if no other method will be tried, be effectually impregnated with the fumes or ſubſtance of negative electricity.

There is ſold in London, and perhaps other places, a particular flannel, known by the name of "blue flannel nine "times dipped for gouty people." A near relation of mine when in town, not many months ago, was attacked with a ſevere fit of the gout in his foot and arm, the latter being exceedingly painful, inflamed and ſwelled down to the fingers, was wrapt in this blue flannel, and made a very ſudden diſappearance, without any ſupervening ſymptom of miſplaced or atonic gout: he however was not ſo ſuperſtitious as to attribute this fortunate event to the flannel. I muſt own, I wiſh to know the compoſition of it's dye, as probably it might confirm my conjecture.

It is not my intention to preſcribe for

gouty people, in any other method, than to adviſe againſt every means by which an exceſs of phlogiſton may be induced; Dr. Cullen has ſo ably treated on the antiphlogiſtic method, and given ſuch rules as cannot fail of alleviating, if not extirpating this dreadful diſorder, ſhould any one have reſolution enough to avail themſelves of his advice.——It gives me particular pleaſure to coincide with the Doctor's ſentiments, the gout being a diſorder of the ſolids, it's prediſpoſition to proceed from their particular make or configuration, and not from any alkaline matter in the blood, appear to me perfectly conformable with the idea here delivered. The ill effects proceeding from a relaxed habit, and debilitated conſtitution, with a plethoric ſtate of the fluids, as a diminution of inſenſible perſpiration, languid circulation, and every means impeding the exit of ſuperabundant phlogiſton, 'tis no wonder we perceive the dreadful conſequences of it's retention, in a lingering atonic attack, often more fatal than the moſt violent podagric paroxyſm.

No claſs of diſorders ſeems to have been leſs underſtood than thoſe termed nervous : it is but lately that the theory of a fluid moving in the nerves by which all ſenſation is performed has been eſtabliſhed, but if we may draw concluſions from the preſent improvements in Natural Philoſophy, the period is not far diſtant when we ſhall arrive at a more competent knowledge of medical and philoſophical truths. Not only our own countrymen, but our indefatigable neighbours, are making great progreſs to perfect our art.

The Monthly Review for June laſt, contains an account of the "Oeuvres "de M. Boſe d'Antic," king's phyſician, and correſpondent of the Royal Academy of Sciences at Paris. This induſtrious philoſopher we find exhibits an *analyſis* of the *electrical fluid*, in order to diſcover it's true nature, and proves by a great number of experiments, that the electrical matter is nothing more than the *colouring principle*, or the phlogiſton modified by the *phoſphoric acid.*

We have in the ſame month's Review an account of a foreign publication ſtill more applicable to the preſent ſubject. Monſieur Bertholin, prieſt of St. Lazarus, and member of ſeveral academies, has juſt publiſhed at Paris, a diſſertation "De l'Electricite du Corps Humain dans "l'Etat de Santé et de Maladie, &c." in which the electricity of the atmoſphere, and it's influences and effects on the animal Oeconomy, are particularly conſidered. In the ſecond part of this prize, diſſertation, which was crowned by the

Royal Academy of Sciences at Lyon; the author conſiders the body in a diſordered ſtate, and more eſpecially thoſe diſorders which proceed from the *abundance* or *defect* of the electrical fluid in the human body, and the means of remedying both this *abundance* and *defect*." Vide Review.

I muſt regret the ſatisfaction I have loſt in not ſeeing a publication which will undoubtedly throw conſiderable illuſtration on my ſubject.

In the Appendix to the ſixty-fourth volume of the Monthly Review, I have the pleaſure to find, or at leaſt to fancy I find, ſome corroboration of my ſentiments, in the account of the works of the celebrated Abbè Mann, but as my reader muſt have read this account, I ſhall not trouble him with examiningevery point of compariſon, in which, with reſpect to the analogy between the electrical and animal fluids, this memoir preſents us in a very ingenious and plauſible manner. See the Appendix.

We ſeem now to have no room left for entertaining a ſingle doubt of the curious truth, that the electrical fluid enters into the compoſition of the animal frame; the wonderous electricity of the Torpedo and Anguille Tremblante of Surinam, the former of which fiſhes, 'tis well known has the power of giving a proper electrical ſhock, with various other obſervations, confirm it.

After all theſe corroborating circumſtances, I flatter myſelf that the theory here delivered, will not appear altogether unphiloſophical, and I farther flatter myſelf, that a little attention to the truths of nature, from ſenior practitioners, will eſtabliſh a ſucceſsful method of curing the gout. From a publication of the ingenious Dr. Loftus Wood, ſecretary to the Medical Society of London, I beg leave to tranſcribe the following remark; " Paralytic and rheumatic complaints, ſays " he, being often accompanied with " acute or inflammatory diſeaſes, led " me to conſider a mode, by which " electricity might be uſefully em- " ployed in ſuch caſes: it was natural " to conclude, that if throwing a certain " quantity of electric matter into the " human body, would heat as well " as accelerate the circulation of the " blood; the extracting, or taking a " certain quantity away from the " human body, muſt produce quite a " different effect.

" In order to put this theory into " practice, by the aſſiſtance of Mr. " Walker, I conſtructed an electric

" machine, that electrified negatively, " by forming a communication between the perſon to be ſo electrified " and the rubber, which anſwered my " expectations; by this means I could " lower the pulſe in as great a degree " as it could be raiſed by the poſitive " method. I have uſed this ſtate of " electricity, ſays our author, in inflammatory rheumatiſms, acute, and " putrid fevers, with much good ſucceſs." p. 30.

May it pleaſe the Divine Being to grant the ſame ſucceſs to gouty patients! and when we conſider the great number who now ſuffer in this diſeaſe, not ſo much from their own inattention to exciting cauſes, as from labouring under a prediſpoſition: it ſeems conſiſtent with the goodneſs of Infinite Wiſdom, that a race of miſerable mortals may find relief, every attempt to adminiſter which, cannot fail of acquiring applauſe.

Should theſe thoughts be of any ſervice in promoting the wiſhed for event, I ſhall be particularly happy, not only in their ſuggeſtion, on a general philanthropic conſideration, as relieving a kind and indulgent parent, aſſiſting ſome of my beſt friends, martyrs to this diſeaſe, but perhaps freeing myſelf from thoſe tortures which an hereditary prediſpoſition give me reaſon to dread.

Young practitioners are deprived the ſatisfaction of trying experiments on thoſe diſorders, which are ſeldom met with, but in the houſes of luxurious affluence; it is therefore from the concurrence of ſenior practitioners that we muſt expect ſucceſs, to meet whoſe approbation will be my greateſt pride.

Were I to ſpeak of internal medicines, I ſhould think that dephlogiſticated air, if it could be procured in ſufficient quantities, might, with the due application of tonic medicines, be of ſervice. From a memoir "Concerning the dephlogiſtication of phlogiſticated Air," by M. Archard, mentioned in the Appendix we have before been obliged to, we have hopes that ſuch a medicine may make a valuable addition to the *materia medica*; but I ſhall now conclude my remarks, with ardently wiſhing to ſee the victory over the opprobrium of the *ars medendi* once compleat.

FINIS.

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